DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 199 790 CS 503 305

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TITLE Minorities in the Media.
INSTITUTION Freedom of Information Center, Columbia, Mo.
REPORT NO FOI-436
PUB DATE Mar 80
NOTE 12p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Blacks; Black Stereotypes; *Broadcast Industry; Characterization; Employment Patterns; Film Industry; *Mass Media; Newspapers; News Reporting; *Racial Discrimination; Role Perception; Television

ABSTRACT

The four reports in this compilation focus on the role of blacks in the various media. The first report provides a general discussion of the status of blacks in the media, and notes that it has been largely analogous to their political and economic development. The second report traces the changing image of blacks as it has been portrayed on television, in both entertainment shows and news coverage. It also discusses the advent of black owned television stations. The third report considers the lack of a black presence in journalism and the subsequent lack of news coverage in the black community. The final report analyzes the role of image of blacks projected in movies from "Birth of a Nation" to the recent television movie, "Beulah Land." (FL)

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MARCH, 1980

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FREEDOM OF INFORMATION CENTER REPORT NO. 436

MINORITIES IN THE MEDIA

The following is a compilation of reports by Regina G. Sherard, a doctoral candidate at the University of Missouri School of Journalism, and Sheila T.T. Lynch and Deborah Elaine Heard, both of whom are master's candidates at the University of Missouri School of Journalism.

The political and economic development of blacks over the past two decades has been both dramatic and superficial. The pattern of the status of blacks in the media likewise followed a similar motif. While the signs of progress show evidence of social change and a consistent, if not concerted effort by the media to be responsive to the black community, they also reflect a growing black consensus and a progressing level of tolerance by a white-dominated field.

America's tendency toward supermarket journalism, where the consumer dictates what is or is not present in the media, has caused the media to place greater emphasis on the consumers with the largest amount of economic and social pressure. Historically, minorities have had neither the economic nor social power and, therefore, have not played a terribly important role in the media.

The involvement of blacks in the media has systematically focused on exposure, broad visibility, the creation of role models and the potential for affecting change in attitudes with respect to positive imaging. Although these priorities were fostered initially within the upper echelons of the media industry, they were dictated by the aggressive assertion of blacks toward political and economic solvency. While the crude reality bares such a quest to be nothing more than the adoption of an illusion of power, the black experience in the media derived its momentum from the "black power" movement of the '60s.

The ideology of black power, which found its support among the alienated masses of urban residents has faded into the shadow of complacency. But during its zenith, the advocacy of black power embraced the bitter disaffection of the poor with a militant determination.

The powerlessness of blacks had been clearly identified as a lack of control over the institutions that affect and govern their lives, as well as the inaccessibility to the "channels of communication, influence and appeal."[1] The struggle for power and control requires access to those institutions directly responsible for disseminating information to the masses and input into the depiction, whether real or symbolic, of the reformists to the mass audience. Hence, the need to reinforce a positive, though not necessarily credible, image of blacks and the black experience provided an even greater incentive for generating the proliferation of blacks in the media.

The riotous '60s yielded new black leadership that was ill-prepared to effectively use the political and economic leverage that surfaced in the black community, and had left a vulnerable, albeit accommodating society whose concern over social unrest had been legitimized by the report of the National Commission of Civil Disorders (the Kerner Commission):

> The absence of Negro faces and activities from the media has an effect on white audiences as well as black. If what the white American. . .sees on television conditions his expectation of what is ordinary and normal in the larger society, he will neither understand nor accept the black American. . . .But such attitudes, in an area as sensitive and inflammatory as this, feed Negro alienation and intensify white prejudices.[2]

The report of the commission, which had been appointed by President Lyndon Johnson to discern the causes of the rioting, remains the definitive background piece on the media's minority coverage. While the commission pointed out other causes for the riots that were surely more significant than poor media coverage, it blasted the media for its insufficient and stereotypical coverage of minorities. The commission stated:

> By failing to portray the Negro as a matter of routine and in the context of the total society, the news media have, we believe, contributed to the black-white schism in this country.[3]

The commission further emphasized this point by providing statistics concerning the small number of minorities employed in the media at that time. Only five percent of news-editorial employees and one percent of editors and supervisors in the American news media were black. According to the report, the media, which was viewed as part of the traditional white power structure, had helped establish a self-perpetuating alienation between minorities and the media and between blacks and whites.

As a result, the media reluctantly opened its doors to blacks. What has been described as a "running sore on the national body" by W.H. Ferry, [4] would have been allowed to

Summary:

The contemporary status of blacks in the media has been largely analogous to their political and economic development. The media, both electronic and print, have been accused of practicing exclusionary measures regarding minority hiring and promotions. And the image of blacks portrayed in the media has long been a topic of hot debate.

fester had the issue of black representation in the media been left solely to the conscience of the industry:

> Masscomm felt free to ignore or represent the real plight of the Negro. . .because it is white, rich and privileged, because of sheer delinquency, and because masscomm believes its audience dislikes disagreeable realities.[5]

Nevertheless, the response by the media found consolation in the fact that black people and their fight were big news, and the dictates of a black agenda for power created a fertile environment for the development of a righteously dichotomous relationship, which continues today throughout media's many facets.

FOOTNOTES

1. Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders. New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1968, p. 205.
2. Ibid., p. 383.
3. Ibid., p. 324.
4. William L. Rivers, Wilbur Schramm and Clifford G. Christians. Responsibility in Mass Communications (New York: Harper and Row, 1980), p. 2030.
5. Ibid.

BLACKS IN TELEVISION

By Regina G. Sherard

Blacks are: inferior, lazy, dumb and dishonest;
either clowns or crooks;
professional quacks and thieves without adequate skill and ethics

Such was the stereotyped portrayal of blacks blatantly perpetuated by network television in the CBS series, "Amos 'n' Andy."[1] From 1951 until the network barred syndication and overseas sales of the program in 1966, the presentation of blacks was patently offensive. Although television had inherited "Amos 'n' Andy" from radio, the visual medium was explicit and glaring in its degradation and "black" humor.

The show's creators, Freeman Gosden and Charles Correll, expressed some concern over the visual adaption of the series. However, their concern did not reflect a sensitivity to blacks or the critical objections of the black community; instead the appeasement was in deference to the discomfort that white viewers may have experienced in seeing blacks on the television screen:

> Gosden and Correll trained black actors to portray the characters "in the nuances of the stereotype" with which whites would be comfortable. Apparently, to avoid interaction between blacks and whites, Amos and Andy lived in an all-black world in which all the judges, policemen, shop owners, and city clerks were black.[2]

The ludicrous contradiction in the contrived world of "Amos 'n' Andy" was that discrimination in America during this time prohibited blacks from achieving positions such as they held in the series. This irony is conversely suggestive of a comment made some years later by Whitney Young:

> . . .there was a television show on one of the stations, . . .(that) presented a scene from 125th St. station with nothing but white people in it. Now I don't know how many of you know 125th Street in Harlem. But it takes a real genius to shoot a scene from 125th Street in Harlem and have nothing but white people in it.[3]

To avoid affronting the sensibilities of a white audience and thereby risking the wrath of sponsors, network television focused its attention of blacks on roles that exploited the stereotype in a variety of ways. As singers and tap dancers, blacks sustained the image of "having rhythm;" as maids, black women were doting "Aunt Jemimas" whose obeisant manner was met with condescension; as handymen, black men were basically slow-witted and recalcitrant misfits. To reinforce the idea of not taking blacks seriously, such "slice of life" programs portrayed them in contextual formats of comedy — situations in which they were ridiculed and laughed at under the guise of entertainment.

The 1950s was a period that saw a tremendous exertion of influence and control by advertisers in television programming:

> Sponsors controlled the programs through a variety of prescriptions and proscriptions designed to evoke positive associations with products or to avoid negative ones. . . .
>
> Generally, advertisers wanted programs they sponsored to be as conducive as possible to selling their products. To do this, they instructed writers to "create a bright sales atmosphere" and to write "happy shows for happy people with happy problems."[4]

Any realistic portrayal of the black experience during this period in history would certainly be a blight on the "happiness" mystique and would undoubtedly generate abashed sentiments among viewers.

Sponsors were also leery of having their products associated with blacks. An example is given of Nat King Cole, the first black to star in a network variety show, who experienced great difficulty in obtaining advertising support. When the show first aired on NBC in 1956, it was carried without commercial sponsorship. The popularity and performance in the ratings encouraged the co-sponsorship by Rheingold Beer, but it was not sufficient to sustain "The Nat King Cole Show" beyond a year:

> It was without a sponsor because of the general fear of advertisers that their product might be linked with a black face. The offense of the white consumer, not support of the black consumers, loomed in the would-be sponsors' minds.[5]

When the networks began to assume control over program production, a ratings war ensued that pivoted around action-oriented entertainment shows. The "audience-flow" concept of television news[6] pre-imposes an entertainment function, which characterized news programming. After the Supreme Court desegregation decision in 1954 and the acceleration of civil protests, the nation's attention was focused on the highly dramatic elements of the civil rights struggle. The vivid images of ". . .young Negroes dragged out of buildings, grim-jawed sit-ins surrounded by angry whites, hoodlums pouring mustard on the heads of blacks at a lunch counter, and police moving in with brutal swiftness"[7] were brought into the homes of viewers during prime-time. The television medium became very skilled at covering the "action" of the civil rights movement, with the "good guys and bad guys" clearly identified. Since the movement was for the most part a regional one in the South, the northern-based networks highlighted the atrocities with little recognition of the impending crisis at their own backdoor.

The Changing Climate of the Sixties

By 1964 a chain of events had been set in motion that did nothing less than shock an unprepared North and horrify an unsuspecting nation. Sixteen days after President Johnson signed the long-awaited Civil Rights Act, tension erupted in Harlem; after New York came Watts, Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, Newark, Baltimore and D.C. As the black movement began to take a running leap in a direction that gave way to impatience and the assertion of power, the major issue became a question of control. An idealistic goal at best, control of the community and control of institutions was interpreted as a functioning hand in the decision-making that affects the black communtiy. In the case of the media, the elements of control were realized through attempts to make news and programming relevant to the black community, reflective of the underlying cause of social unrest in the ghettos, a representative of a realistic as well as positive portrayal of blacks. The dubiousness of some of these interests would cause some to wonder how relevancy is defined, for surely what is relevant to some may not be relevant to all of the black community; and a realistic portrayal of blacks may not necessarily be a positive one. But as the formal news source relied upon in the black community,[8] television was the main object of discontent.

In response to the charge that television coverage of the facts of black unrest had been magnificent in comparison to the underlying grievances, the networks hired a handful of black reporters to cover the riots and tell the story of the black experience in American. Some of the more noted reporters like Chuck Stone, Mal Goode, Robert Teague, Ted Coleman, William Matney and Wendell Smith achieved national acclaim.[9]

A marriage of television and the black movement was imminent as Molefi Kete Asante described:

> For television, the black movement could produce a massive demonstration of singing, chanting blacks, frequently attacked by fierce-looking state troopers and policemen. For blacks, television could cover the grievances and abuses of the black masses and send them nationwide, perhaps worldwide. . . .[10]

The vast coverage of development on the civil rights scene served as a visual chronicler of black protest. Television newscasts presented blacks in a sympathetic light and familiarized the public with leaders who were recognized by the black community. In news and public service programming that did not address the civil rights issue, blacks were conspicuously included to provide the "black perspective." The on-the-scene reporters and field interviewers made sure that any representative group of Americans contained at least one black. CBS broadcast a seven-part series, "Of Black America," in the "hot summer" of '68 that was hosted by black comedian Bill Cosby. But while the series was hailed as a first to seriously address the degradation of blacks by white America, it was severely criticized for employing few blacks in the planning and production of the series.[11]

In the fall of that year, "Julia" made its debut on primetime television with the recurring proclamation by NBC that it was being presented "with pride." However, what was labeled as pride over the air may have been a boardroom decision of sublime resignation:

> The previous January NBC had rejected the pilot for the series. In February when the network's programming executives were preparing the fall schedule, they were faced with a half-hour to fill opposite CBS' popular "The Red Skelton Show." Believing that any of their potential choices would fail to be a match against Skelton, Paul Klein of NBC's audience research department argued that selecting "Julia" to fill the empty time slot would accomplish something of social value.[12]

Klein further argued that while "Julia" might be saccharine, ". . .it had racial importance at a time when television was under heavy criticism as a lily-white medium. With Diahann Caroll in the lead it would be the first situation comedy since the opprobrious "Amos 'n' Andy" to be built around a black person. . . ."[13] Although the show was a success by rating standards, the social value of "Julia" as a response to the social issues being raised during this period of urban uprisings is somewhat ludicrous. Marilyn Fife's insightful observation of "Julia's" redeeming merits is poignantly descriptive:

> Giving the entire series the benefit of the doubt, there was nothing malicious about "Julia." It was simply another bit of fluffy TV viewing, more in the tradition of Doris Day than Ralph Bunche. Unfortunately, it (made its debut) at a time when civil disturbance was running high in black communities, and it was not the kind of thing that appeased militant minds. It was not what blacks visualized when the Kerner Commission called for more positive black images in the media. "Julia's" main failings were based on what it omitted, and its basic approach to the presentation of black family life in the USA. Though it had some gentle "kidding" jokes between Julia and her white associates, it didn't recognize the facts of black-white communication problems. Everyone in the show operated on a fairly one-dimensional basis that excluded black identity.[14]

The 1960s also saw a sudden recognition of black consumerism. When in 1963 the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists issued a statement promising to ". . .take affirmative steps toward the end that minority group performers are cast in all types of roles so that the American scene may be portrayed realistically,"[15] it was met a month later with the NAACP's adopted resolution

> . . .calling for selective buying campaigns against the products of those who sponsor offensive motion pictures, television and radio programs or whose programs ignore the presence and achievement of American Negroes, or who refuse to give equal employment opportunity to Negroes.[16]

White-owned businesses discovered that the more than 20 million black consumers of products advertised on televison constituted a viable market. Attractive, mulatto-complexioned models were the most frequently seen type in commercials that initially featured blacks. But advertising lagged far behind the news and entertainment areas in utilizing black performers. A survey conducted in March 1966 by the American Civil Liberties Union showed that blacks had 3.35 percent of the speaking roles and 8.49 percent of the non-speaking roles in regular television programs; less than 1 percent of the roles in television commericals went to black performers.[18] According to a report issued in 1964 by the Committee on Integration of the New York Society for Ethical Culture, the comparative findings of its monitoring survey conducted in 1962 and 1964 showed an increase from 2 to 36 black appearances in commercials and public service

announcements.[19] In 1965, a television audit by Schmidt for Los Angeles revealed 2 percent of the commercials had black models, which broke down into .65 percent with speaking roles and 1.39 percent with non-speaking roles.[20] By the end of 1969, one audit study showed an increase up to 8 percent of commercials containing blacks.[21] While these figures do not reflect absolute numbers of blacks being used in television commercials and are not necessarily indicative of any particular sensitivity on the part of sponsors, they do reflect a growing trend in the '60s that signaled recognition of the black dollar, if not that of the black problem.

From Misfit to Super-Hero

The "Swinging 70s" ushered in a more permissive, youth-oriented era that had been adversely affected by the war at home and the war abroad. In an effort to respond to some of the more salient issues permeating a troubled society, such programs as "Mod Squad," "Storefront Lawyers," "The Man and the City," "The Young Lawyers," and "The Young Rebels" attempted to offer solutions. One element of relevancy common to this new genre of shows was the inclusion of young blacks. With the exception of "Mod Squad," a show built around the premise that young, hip cops could be effective working outside the system and yet maintain the establishment's principle of law and order, all the other shows failed. Les Brown attributes the failure to their having created a "false aura of relevance" that was unrealistic:

> . . .militants were not angry revolutionaries but paranoiacs or agents of hostile countries;. . . bigots, not true haters but merely persons who lived too long in isolation from other races; drug users not the disenchanted but victims of ghoulish weirdos and organized crime. Television faced the gut issues with false characters and instead of shedding light on the ailments of the social system and the divisions within it, the playlets distorted the questions and fudged the answers.[22]

Brown also pointed to the motives of these programs:

> For all their genuflections toward social awareness, the networks intent was not so much to involve themselves with the real issues of the day as patently to exploit them for purposes of delivering up to advertisers more of the young consumers than before without alienating the older habitues of the medium.[23]

An obvious aspect of these and other programs that followed in the '70s was the depiction of blacks in the role of "good guys." Bill Cosby portrayed the black super-hero in the popular "I Spy" series, succeeded by "Shaft," "Tenafly," "The Rookies," and "Get Christy Love." The super-hero syndrome suggested that television was attempting to compensate for unfavorable news coverage in the past by portraying blacks as super characters in entertainment programs. Blacks were shown in atypical situations as the champions of the downtrodden and the courageous opponents of white antagonists. To reinforce the down-to-earth quality of these shows, the dialogue was heavily weighted with such black colloquialisms as "right-on," "get down," "brother," "sister," "the man," and "honky." These shows were off-shoots of the black exploitation movies that had been so popular with an element of the black audience.

The "super-black" period was followed by variety shows and situation comedies that featured blacks as stars in the primary roles. Flip Wilson, Redd Foxx and Bill Cosby capitalized on a style of black humor that forced blacks to laugh at themselves; ghetto jokes and similar travesties on black life were popularized by television. A paradoxical characteristic of such programs was that they projected a positive and negative image of blacks—the black star who exploited the nuances of deprivation and depicted the brutal realities of poverty. For all the subtle implications of the "super-black" stereotype in television, these shows did provide a cushion for the presentation of more serious dramas that explored provocative themes.

One of the most popular and humorous treatments of controversial issues on televison may be attributed to Norman Lear, whose realistic approach to contemporary social problems gave us such hits as "Maude," and "All in the Family." The black series, "Good Times" and "The Jeffersons," which were the respective spin-offs from Lear's premier comedies, were a tremendous success during the early '70s. The black shows had antithetical themes; "Good Times" explored the lives of the Evans family whose futile efforts to escape a Chicago ghetto combined equal amounts of pathos and humor, while the Jefferson family was the all-American story of rags to riches. Lear's black characters brought bigotry, discrimination and racial inequality into the open as did other shows such as "Sanford and Son," and "That's My Mama." But their popularity was not without criticism as shows created by whites for the entertainment of whites — a sort of "Amos 'n' Andy" revisited.

> The television industry protects itself by puting in a double consciousness. They take authentic issues in the black community and distort them. The humor is still black people are 'dumb nigger' types. . . .
>
> . . .Blacks are still not given credit for having insight. If good things happen to them, it's luck, like hitting the number. They still don't have control over their own destinies. The thing that we can ask of television is that black characters be funny and intelligent.[24]

Eugenia Collier supports the argument in her article " 'Black' Shows for White Viewers," that

> . . .The presence of blacks on TV has not heralded social progress but has simply demonstrated that an innocuous image of the black community is comforting and entertaining to white viewers and therefore profitable to big money interests.[25]

Because television was innundated with afro-coiffed black faces during the '70s, much of the criticsim fell on deaf ears in the black community. Their patronage of the new black comedies made stars of the heretofore unknown. Viewers were presented with characters who could joke about their miseries and laugh at their ignorance despite a constant array of harassment and insulting innuendo. But the National Black Feminist Organization took opposition to the sophisticated demeaning of blacks in many of the shows during the 1974 television season. In a statement reminiscent of the NAACP's 1951 complaint against "Amos 'n' Andy," the organization made the following observations:[26]

1. Black shows are slanted toward the ridiculous with no redeeming counter images;
2. Third World peoples are consistently cast in extremes;
3. When blacks are cast as professional people, the characters they portray generally lack professionalism and give the impression that black people are incapable and inferior in such positions;
4. When older persons are featured, black people are usually cast as shiftless derelicts or nonproductive individuals;
5. Few black women in TV programs are cast as profession-

als, paraprofessionals or even working people;
6. Black children, by and large, have no worthy role models on television.

The '70s was an impressive decade for blacks on television as their visibility in commercials, comedies, news and other areas of programming increased significantly. However, the critics would question whether this visibility constitutes an improvement from a sociological perspective. Are programs with black performers and so-called black themes merely grafts of the white image of reality; or is the black experience being revealed in its own environment and on its own terms? Is the "Amos 'n' Andy" syndrome being subtly perpetuated to stereotype blacks? Is television still stressing the "bad news" of the black community over its positive aspects? Has the television industry been as responsive in accelerating blacks behind the camera in management positions as it has been in showcasing them in front of the camera? The questions arise not from a dispute of whether improvements have been made, but from the extent to which progressive advancement of blacks in television has made a positive impact on the social inequities within the medium. These and other concerns have prompted the development in recent years of such groups as the National Black Media Coalition and Black Citizens for Fair Media to monitor programs for their authenticity and fair representation of blacks. However, the efforts of media groups and the protestations of the critics have contributed to a more optimistic climate of thought by some:

> Thus, the problem of the role of blacks in the media, as well as the coverage of blacks by the media, while improving constantly, is still in need of further organized effort. To tell the story of the black community requires more blacks as reporters and writers, as well as more blacks on camera in sequences that are non-violent and affirmative. There is still a perception of the black community and the black experience as phenomena which are out of the milieu of the white-dominated institutional power structure. But the portents are clearly positive — as the 1970s merge into the 1980s, it is possible to predict with confidence that the black community will receive more adequate and more honest coverage by all the media and that perceptions will change to an acceptance of the black community as an integral and creative entity in the social, political and economic life of this country.[27]

We have yet to see if the expressed optimism exemplified in this quotation will bear actual witness in this new decade of the 80s, particularly with respect to "an acceptance of the black community as an integral and creative entity in the social, political and economic life of this country." But as of 1979, 11 years after the Kerner Commission blasted the media for being ". . .shockingly backward in hiring, training and promoting" blacks, statistics indicated that television had not risen to the challenge:[28]

- While composing 17 percent of the population, only two percent of all media practitioners are black;
- Approximately 99 percent of all news editors and station managers are white;
- While Detroit had the first black VHF television station in 1975, WHEC-TV in Rochester, New York, became the first black-owned station in 1979;
- Blacks have not been able to control cable television franchises in urban areas with a majority black population;
- Black students in journalism schools comprise less than four percent of the total enrollment.

William Hines of the Chicago **Sun Times** remarks that in a city like Washington where the population in the central city is 70 percent black, ". . .there is no real black TV presence (not counting the obligatory black anchorman on every white-controlled station's nightly news show)."[29]

Black employment in the media showed significant improvement during the '70s, but in the context of their representation in the audience and their managerial input, policy-making in the television industry is still very much a white domain. While television does deserve credit for its efforts in trying to atone for past employment inequities, it is important to remember that these efforts were instigated in the face of pressure from a national black agenda, rather than the natural evolution of progress.

It was a relatively easy move to employ blacks in positions that afforded visibility during a time when the issues of civil rights lent themselves so well to the visual medium. But contemporary problems of the 1980s have yielded a need to address different issues, some of which may not be as clearly defined as those during the 1960s:

> The axis press issues have shifted since the days when black Americans had to demonstrate for the right to ride in the front of a bus, sit at a lunch counter, or use a bathroom. The challenge in the 1960s was to crack the color barrier in the press corps and to report the movements for social and economic justice. Today the struggle in journalism is over a second generation of issues; tokenism in employment (as intolerable today to minorities as was exclusion in the sixties), and inaccurate, inadequate portrayal of minority communities (even less excusable than was total neglect years ago).[30]

An examination of the two popular black shows, "Good Times" and "Different Strokes," points to an exploitation of old stereotypes transposed to atypical environments. George Jefferson is an ignorant, loud-mouthed man who screams at his family, insults his friends and berates his inter-racial inlaws with one-liners that inevitably focus on the "honky." Whereas at one time it was considered unthinkable to openly cast aspersions on blacks, it is acceptable for George to be openly hostile to every white character in the show. But George is rich, and he owns a chain of cleaning stores, thereby functioning ostensibly like any other white business executive.

Arnold is an apple-cheeked 8-year-old who lives with his rich white adoptive father and his interracial siblings in a posh apartment. Having come from a ghetto environment, little Arnold has adjusted remarkably to his new family, exhibiting none of the usual trauma that one would expect from a child who had lost his only parent, none of the anticipated identity problems that youngsters under similar circumstances may experience. Instead, Arnold has made the transition into a predominately white world with humorous ease and precocity. Furthermore, no one seems to really notice that Arnold and his brother are black. In fact, neither do they.

New Directions

Within the past five years, there has been an increased emphasis by black entrepreneurs on media ownership. Whereas black-owned and black-oriented radio stations have been a relatively common reality for many years, blacks have traditionally been unsuccessful in making any significant headway in the television industry. The most obvious reason is that with limited frequencies, the three ma-

jor networks have monopolized ownership and programming, and local markets have been unreceptive.

With the advent of "low power" television, market segmentation will provide opportunities for blacks to offer programming for the black community. On a recent edition of the black news program, the discussion focused on one such service that is currently being developed. Known as the Community Televsion Network, this low power television service will offer a variety of minority and children's programming plus a nightly news broadcast. The Community Television Network is coordinated through the efforts of three black lawyers, Dan Winston, Booker Wade and Sam Cooper, all of whom were previously with the Federal Communications Commission. The new television service is being backed financially with $60 million from the Golden West Corporation, an affiliate of Gene Autry Enterprises, Inc. The new service is described as an adaptation of an old technology known as "television translator service," wherein CTN will provide new programming outlets for the black community within a range of 12 to 15 miles, compared to a range of 40 to 60 miles for traditional frequencies. It will also incorporate a subscription television service for pay subscribers who will receive "premium programming," including movies, selected entertainment features and sports.

The new direction of black involvement in the television industry will undoubtedly be at a snail's pace, and without sufficient support and resources, it will remain a goal and not a realization. Although such efforts as those initiated on behalf of the Community Television Network are encouraging, the question of survival becomes paramount in consideration of competition, advertising revenues, and audience appeal. Nevertheless, independent black television networks suggest the same pioneering attitude that gave birth to the black press — an attitude that was built upon the founding words, "We wish to plead our own cause."

FOOTNOTES

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2. **Ibid.**
3. Churchill Roberts, "The Portrayal of Blacks on Network Television," **Journal of Broadcasting**, Winter, 1970-71, p. 45.
4. **United States Commission on Civil Rights**, p. 5.
5. **Ibid.**
6. Edward Jay Epstein, **News From Nowhere**, (New York: Vintage Books, 1974).
7. William Small, **To Kill A Messenger: Television News and the Real World**, (New York: Hastings House, 1974), p. 43.
8. **The Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders** referred to a sample that showed 75 percent of black viewers relied on television for national and international news in 1968.
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12. **Ibid.**
13. **Ibid.**
14. Marilyn Diane Fife, "Black Image in American TV: The First Two Decades," **The Black Scholar**, November 1974, p. 13.
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16. **Ibid.**
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18. **Ibid.**
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24. Joel Dreyfuss, "Blacks and Television, Part 1: Television Controversy: Covering the Black Experience," **Washington Post**, 1 September 1974, p. K5.
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26. **United States Commission on Civil Rights**, pp. 21-22.
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28. Nick Kotz, "The minority struggle for a place in the newsroom," **Columbia Journalism Review**, March/April 1979, pp. 23-31.
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BLACKS IN THE PRESS

By Sheila T.T. Lynch

In his travels across the country as executive director of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and former member of the Federal Communications Commission, Benjamin L. Hooks frequently visited newspapers and found an appalling scarcity of black faces in newsroom settings.

"When I see this, I am somehow reminded of a explanation of how a computer functions: It will put out what is put in. Nothing in, nothing out. No blacks on staffs, so to speak, no black news in the newspaper."[1]

In statistics compiled by Hooks in 1976, he found newspapers to be the worst area of minority news coverage. "The reports I have been able to study indicate that the print media have been pretty steady in exclusion of blacks from positions that count — editorial. That employment figure now is about 3 percent.[2]

The majority of recent studies regarding minority coverage by the media deal with the print medium, not the media in general. The statistics for minorities employed in print, used as reasoning for poor minority coverage, in almost every instance indicate that broadcast has more successfully hired and consequently reported on the minority community.

A study done almost 10 years after the Kerner Commission report showed that 1 percent of newspaper and 3 percent of broadcast employees were minorities.[3]

Charlayne Hunter, a black reporter with the New York Times, views more minority coverage through increased minority hiring as essential to the welfare of society. "As black reporters, we know where the errors of omission occurred — know that if we had been given the chance all along to write what we knew, no one would have been surprised at Harlem, 1964; Watts, 1965; Newark and Detroit, 1967; Washington, 1968 and hundreds of other ignited cities."[4]

Hunter further states that the conditions that led to these riots were there for anyone to see, document and explain long before the uprisings occurred. But, since the press chose, for the most part, to ignore the conditions, white America was totally shocked and surprised that a bunch of blacks, for no apparent reason, took it into their heads to burn down cities.

Robert C. Maynard, formerly on the editorial board of the Washington Post and director of the Berkeley Summer Program for Minority Journalists, discusses the television program "Roots" as a recent illustration of Miss Hunter's theory that the press has left the American people uninformed and unprepared regarding minority news and culture.

"So many whites have since confided that they didn't know before exactly how blacks got here. They just hadn't really thought about it. And, of course, as Kerner said a decade ago — still largely true — there is not much to read of black history and black culture in the average American newspaper.

So we have a case of double-barreled misconceptions. The whites have no notion on one hand of what it is like to live in today's inner city because our newspapers do so little to bring that fact alive. On the other hand, the positive aspects of black American history and culture are obscured for much the same reasons — because in all too many instances there is no black in a position to help shape a product so that it reflects accurately all the disparate elements that make up our society."[5]

Austin Scott, a black reporter formerly with Associated Press, described a bleak picture for minority coverage in the print media. Despite the material changes, he said, journalism is behind the times in minority news.

> I marvel every day that there seem to be more black sheriffs, more black businessmen, more black educators and policemen, more black judges, and state legislators, and computer programmers, and salesmen, and heavy equipment operators. But in a nation of 22 million black people, only a couple dozen of us have the potential to make it in the Associated Press. It's funny how talent is distributed. We can sing and dance and hold conventions, but none of us can write.[6]

Perhaps the crux of the problem rests in the situation in which minorities find themselves. A 1972 survey of 1,760 daily newspapers conducted by the Gannett Urban Journalism Center at the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University in cooperation with the American Society of Newspaper Editors indicated that minority employees, most of whom are black, make up about 2.5 percent of the 40,000 newsroom employees in the United States.[7]

Since most editors are white — according to the survey only 2 percent of news executives are members of a minority group — they do not hear about or understand the concerns of the black community in the same way they hear about their own communities in the normal course of their lives. This is very likely a factor in their news judgment and consequently in their treatment of minority news.[8]

Many black journalists in the newspaper field have expressed their frustration with white editors and their lack of support or understanding of minority problems. Hiring and covering minorities in the '60s were done to prove that the media were not exclusionary. Today's generation of journalists must overcome tokenism in employment.[9]

One example of this change in barriers for minorities is at the New York Times. The Times pioneered in hiring blacks during the '60s and today has about 40 minority professionals on a news staff of 670. A high level of anxiety and dissatisfaction exists among these minority staff members.

Gerald Fraser, cultural-affairs reporter for the Times and one of the first blacks hired in the 1960s said:

> When you view the hiring, the assignments, the promotions, and the product, there is a clear indication that the people who run the paper do not intend to acknowledge any sort of significant minority presence. I don't say that this is worse than any place else, but it's not any better. Essentially, they don't want us around here, and they don't want our viewpoints.[10]

The views of blacks and other minorities are viewed by some editors as dangerously different from those of the whites and, therefore, unworthy of publication or expression in the newspaper. Paul Delaney, an experienced black reporter and an assistant national news editor at the Times, said a meaningful effort by the Times would ensure that non-whites are in every facet of the news operations but the Times' effort speaks for itself. There is no meaningful effort by the Times, Delaney says, to report the complexities of this multiracial society.[11]

Claude Lewis, associate editor of the Philadelphia Bulletin; Albert Fitzpatrick, executive editor of the Akron Beacon Journal; and William Hilliard, assistant managing editor of the Portland Oregonian agreed that white editors are a great source of problems in minority news coverage.

> White editors simply refuse to share power. Even when all professional standards are met, many white editors and publishers simply will not entrust basic news judgments to non-white professionals. White management is unwilling to place coverage decisions in the hands of people whose values and perspective may differ from their own.[12]

At two Gannett newspapers in Rochester, New York, (the Democrat and Chronicle and the Times-Union), it took lawsuits and a unified protest by blacks to secure the appointment of a black assistant city editor and the discussion of a long list of grievances. Executive editor Robert Giles noted, "The blacks made a persuasive case that our coverage of black and Hispanic communities, and of the Third World, was inadequate. They would not accept the fact that we had just made mistakes and not acted as racists."[13]

The end result of these lawsuits and protests forced Giles and the executive staff of the two papers to set a more realistic goal for minority representation on the newspapers. There were 11 blacks on a professional staff of 216 prior to the litigation. Afterward, the organization aimed at a goal of 20 percent minority representaton.[14]

Some editors have expressed a fear that attempting to balance minority news coverage can end in actually prejudicing the news toward one group or another. Many white editors work from the premise that minority reporters cannot be both conscious of their own culture and committed to professional standards of journalism. An inherent conflict of interests seem to appear in what may be an honest attempt to balance the staff representation and news coverage.

Francis West, a black reporter for the Los Angeles Times, attempts to explain and provide an answer to the problem in a fashion satisfying both the minority reporter and the white editor.

> The problem is not only to cover the black community but to reflect that community as black people see it. There is a special responsibility that society imposes on black reporters because they are black. We're black people as well as reporters, and I don't think you can divide the two. We ought to write news about black and general news, too — it's not an either/or proposition.[15]

Despite the fact that there has been no great influx of minorities into journalism, a few groups believe the press' mi

nority coverage has improved due to a more aware and sensitive corps of media professionals.

At a recent conference, members of the Institute for Democratic Communication discussed the media and minorities. The members voiced a general agreement that progress was being made in minority coverage and staffing, but concern was expressed that true equality in the newsroom is a goal more talked about than achieved.[16]

Robert Sales, managing editor of the Boston **Herald American**, claimed that jobs exist for minorities and for any other qualified people on his newspaper. He continued in saying that, "Ethnic reporters give a paper access to their communities. Still, a minority reporter need not be restricted by assignments to cover only minority stories."[17]

One of the major points of this article is that the editors and institute members base their analysis of minority coverage on hiring trends, not on analyses of their products' content or on statistics. This may be because the statistics of minorities in journalism have not changed substantially since the early '70s. Still, the opinions of the editors are optimistic regarding minority coverage and certainly are more aware than in the early '60s.

Loren Ghiglione, Southbridge (Mass.) **Evening News** editor-publisher, feels that journalism's growing professionalism works against equality. His reasoning, "The increasing tendency to hire (college-educated) professionals means that these people are advantaged, and don't come from small-town ghettos, or get wages that prevent them from experiencing a lower-class life. And since the reporter aims at objectivity, non-middle class values are kept out of the newspaper."[18]

Ghiglione's contention that growing professionalism may be isolating the media from the ordinary people and minorities is echoed by many press critics.

The institute members noted that minority hiring and subsequently minority coverage are improving as recruitment efforts are begun by the press. Leroy Aarons, a former Washington **Post** reporter and editor who now helps run the Institute for Journalism Education's Jobnet for minority news people, sees the hiring situation improving with more than 100 newspapers seeking minority reporters. Some papers and groups — specifically Gannett — are interested in improving minority coverage through directly improving the status quo of minority reporters.[19]

Conclusions

While there have been efforts made by isolated organizations, the media as a whole have not concerned themselves with doing anything regarding minorities other than placating them. The journalism institutions and organizations discussed realize minority coverage is a problem but they are content, and have been since the Kerner Commission report in 1967, with minor advancements and major pronouncements.

If the established media hope to reach and maintain subscribers in the black community, editors and programmers must make a greater, conscious effort to cover the minority community better than it has previously been covered. This effort would include:

1. a greater quantity of minority coverage focusing on the historical, developmental and social news of the community;
2. a higher quality of minority coverage focusing on the day to day news and on the achievements and successes of the community; and
3. an attempt at balancing the negative, stereotypical aspects of minority coverage with the existing positive aspects.

Employing more minority members within the media and moving the qualified minority members through the media structure into positions of authority would probably meet with strong opposition from not only white editors but white readers too. Many whites have been shown to be indifferent to minority coverage.[20] It is possible that the white community might propel a backlash against the media as a result of too much minority news and entertainment. However, presently the less economically powerful minority community is engaged in a backlash of its own against the media.

The key to whether or not changes will occur in the total media's minority coverage, is whether the white press cares about reaching its potential minority audience. It may be that it would not be economically or practically feasible to gamble on losing the majority readership who might resent too much minority coverage.

The Commission on Civil Disorders stated in 1967 that the press has treated blacks as if they do not read newspapers or watch television, give birth, marry, die and go to PTA meetings. From the content of today's media, the commission could make the same statement without fear of rebuttal.

While minority coverage has improved in quantity to a limited extent, the quality of coverage has worsened in many views because no coverage can be seen as better than negative coverage. By the same token, without any coverage, there could be no possibility for improvement.

Based on the literature since the Kerner report and the attitudes of the writers, minority coverage has not advanced to any significant extent since 1967. The employment statistics and the attitudes expressed indicate that small steps have been taken regarding minority coverage but even those who see positive points also see negative points regarding this subject.

In the 1960s the media had to hire minorities in order to avoid looking like hypocrites, but today, minority journalists see the media pulling back from minority coverage and, worse yet, portraying non-whites in stereotypes.[21]

Robert Maynard of the Institute for Journalism Education made this relevant point concerning the media's minority coverage:

> What we (the minority community) now seek is portrayal of our communities as places inhabited by real people, not pathological fragments. We are not asking to be romanticized. Where there is disease, report disease: crime, report crime. But where there is health, report health; creativity, report creativity.[22]

FOOTNOTES

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2. **Ibid**.
3. "Report Hits Media on Minority Hiring," **Editor and Publisher**, 10 December 1977, p. 14.
4. Robert C. Maynard, "This far by fear," **Nieman Reports** XXXI: 4 (1978), p. 32.
5. **Ibid**.
6. **Ibid**., p. 33.
7. Deidre Carmody, "News of Minorities in Media is Debated," **The New York Times**, 25 September 1977, p. 19.
8. **Ibid**.
9. Nick Kotz, "The Minority Struggle for a Place in the Newsroom," **Columbia Journalism Review**, March/April 1979, p. 24.
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11. Ibid.
12. Ibid., p. 26.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
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16. Bill Kirtz, "Coverage of Minorities and Hiring Improves," Editor and Publisher, 1 December 1979, p. 17.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. Kenneth Wilson, "Negro and White Attitudes Toward Racial Coverage by the Press," M.A. Proposal, University of Missouri, (completed January 1970), p. 160.
21. Kotz, p. 25.
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BLACKS IN THE MOVIES

By Deborah Elaine Heard

> Lawd forgive me Massah Silverman, but dere's somethin' almighty peculiah goin' on at yo' planatation. Des here "Beulah Land," dat NBC is showin', has a whole mess of slaves who talks jes lak dis. Dey is always fiddlin' and whoopin' and steppin' and fetchin', but here's what's got me most addled. Deh white folks what owns dem are so heavenly kind dat dese here darkies just loves bein' slaves. Dey is so happy dat, when dey finally gets dere freedom, dey refuse to leave Beulah Land. Massah Silverman, we sho' appreciated yo' "Roots," but ain't you now goin' wid a mighty ol' wind?[1]

Newsweek writer Harry F. Waters echoed the feeling of many black organizations that charged NBC's six-hour plantation saga "Beulah Land" with perpetuating stereotypes that blacks have been fighting to overcome for decades.

"Beulah Land," which aired on Oct. 14, 15 and 16, 1980, told the story of a tempestous strong-willed Southern belle, who over the course of four decades, keeps her Georgia plantation going despite family bankruptcies, Civil War pillagings, and the invasion of carpetbaggers. The script is complete with hints of a cozier-than-normal arrangement with her black foreman as well as an interracial lesbian relationship.

Protesters, while conceding that there were indeed some benevolent masters and contented slaves, argue that the drama — focusing exclusively on such relationships — fostered the impression that all plantation life was blissful.[2]

These black protesters, often with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People at the forefront, attempted to have the show cancelled, or at the very least, to eliminate or alter the more objectionable parts. On some points they succeeded. On others they failed.

The battle to change the portrayal of black people in movies has been a long one. "Beulah Land" was the most recent target, but the first significant struggle began in 1915 over the movie "The Birth of a Nation."

A melodrama of the Civil War and Reconstruction glorifying the Ku Klux Klan, "The Birth of a Nation," by D.W. Griffith, included just about all the stereotypes of blacks that had been developing in the movies since the mid-1890s. (These stereotypes — whether played by whites in blackface or not — presented Blacks as an uneasy menace, cheerful flunky, tainted unfortunate, or ignorant savage.)[3] "The Birth of a Nation" had its share of "faithful souls" but stressed the concept of the black as a brute and menace. "The black is presented as a person lusting for white women, grasping for white property, and unwilling to accept a preordained station at the bottom of the social ladder. "Birth of a Nation" argued that the Negro was a serious danger to established society unless checked, as in the film, by a white force such as the Ku Klux Klan."[4]

> "The Birth of a Nation" very quickly became the subject of strenuous controversy. The infant (NAACP), other black groups and their white allies tried to have the film banned in its entirety or, failing that to have the more objectionable scenes eliminated. Opponents of the movie went to court or joined picket lines — occasionally expressed their disapproval by planting stink bombs in theaters where it was being shown, or by throwing eggs at the screen. But militant black activity was hampered by the fact that even outside the South most movie houses would not admit Negroes."[5]

Leaders who denounced the film included Harvard University president-emeritus Charles Eliot, William Monroe Trotter, Booker T. Washington, Oswald Garrison Villard and Jane Addams.[6] But for all the outcry, most of the demonstrations proved unsuccessful.

"Birth of a Nation" was an enormous popular success, and for the remainder of the silent period the black on screen was presented not as a human being, but as a cliche representing the lowest form of behavior, aspiration, motivation and performance.[7]

One of the most extravagant and outrageous portraits of the black in the Old South was the one painted in "Gone With the Wind." Many moviegoers accepted David O. Selznick's 1939 movie as historical and social truth. The main difference from Griffith's "The Birth of a Nation" was that "Gone With the Wind"emphasized not the blacks' supposed viciousness but their faithfulness, ignorance and servility.[8]

The primary black figures were Scarlett O'Hara's loyal mammy, who stays with her through good times and bad, through the Civil War and after, and the silly, helpless slave girl Prissy, who admits in one memorable scene that she didn't know nothing "'bout birthin' no babies."

> Except for some left-wing organizations such as the National Negro Congress, there was surprisingly little public outcry against "Gone With the Wind" from black groups. . . .The NAACP had led the fight to cut or soften some of the more offensive scenes in the novel, and it was the organization's relative success in the preproduction phases of the movie that undoubtedly led to its near silence after the film's release.[9]

According to author Daniel J. Leab, the most blatant example of the use of an older stereotype was Walt Disney's "Song of the South" in 1946.[10]

The film dealt with an old black plantation storyteller and his efforts to help a lonely white boy. Uncle Remus, the storyteller, was attacked in an Ebony editorial as an "Uncle Tom - Aunt Jemima caricature complete with all the fawning standard equipment thereof: the toothy smile, battered hat, grey beard, and a profusion of 'dis' and 'dat' talk."[11]

When the film was released it was picketed more heavily than any film since "The Birth of a Nation" and was the subject of much criticism.[12] The protests produced few results. Like "The Birth of a Nation," the movie was quite popular and still is being shown.

Protests against the negative images of blacks in films seemingly made some changes overall as films with positive black images were produced. Such productions included "Home of the Brave," "No Way Out," "Pinky," "Imitation of Life," "God's Step Children," and on up to the 1950s and '60s with films such as "Black Like Me," " Carmen Jones," "Porgy and Bess," "Island in the Sun," "Blackboard Jungle," "Lilies of the Field," "A Raisin in the Sun," and "To Sir, With Love."

The next era evoked a different type of criticism from black protesters. This was the era of black exploitation films.

> By the mid-1970s blacks were seen on screen with a frequency that could almost be called reasonable. Black actors and actresses appeared in everything from crowd scenes to leading roles. . . .Unfortunately this realistic screen image of the black was almost completely overshadowed by a new caricature — Superspade.[13]

The superspade films glorified the role of the tough, urban black. The list is long: "Shaft" (a private detective), "Superfly" (a cocaine dealer), "Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song" (a male prostitute), "Trouble Man" (a detective), "Cleopatra Jones" (a narcotics agent), and "The Mack" (a pimp).

Black protest organizations such as CORE's "Blackpoitation" and the Beverly Hills chapter of the NAACP's "Rating Committee for Black Films" were formed to combat this "supernigger" image.[14]

Black community leaders and critics blasted the films. These films, they said, were counterproductive to development of positive images of black people and as role models for black youths. "In addition to condemning the industry for showing black women as persons of loose morals, they charged that these movies glorified drugs, imitated successful white stereotypes, set forth impossible and ultimately debilitating fantasies, developed a negative image of the American black man and woman and took no real cognizance of black oppression in the United States."[15]

Roy Innes, national director of CORE, stated that "The present black movie phenomenon. . .in its ultimate destruction of the minds of black youth, is potentially more dangerous than "step-n-fetch' it" and his lot."[16]

Not all agreed that these films were totally unproductive. "Proponents of these films suggest that they present a valid slice of life in the black community, a reality that must be understood if it is to be dealt with appropriately."[17]

> No longer does one see Blacks only as servants or as shuffling Uncle Toms. We see Blacks in a variety of roles ranging from heroes to villains, from police officers to disc jockeys, from social workers to soldiers. Since one of the outcomes of Black liberation is to have the Black man viewed as a group of people with varying emotions, varying ideologies and varying roles in the total society. Black films have contributed to the concept of Black liberation by expanding the ways in which Black life is projected in films.[18]

Probably the most significant plus was that these films gave blacks a chance to work both in front of and behind the cameras. However, while several of the movies were box-office successes, few blacks in the industry profited financially. Whites still held the purse strings and therefore controlled the manner in which blacks would be portrayed in films.

A few of the movies of this era such as "Sounder," "The Learning Tree," "Lady Sings the Blues," "Nothing but a Man," "Roots, I and II," "The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman," "A Woman Called Moses," " Paul Robeson," and "I Know Why a Caged Bird Sings" presented a more realistic and human portrayal of blacks.

Black actors and actresses have also spoken out about many of the characters they had to play if they wanted work in the business. "Few blacks accept those negative roles unquestioningly," said actor Robert Hooks in a **Black Enterprise** article.[19] Others accepted the opportunity to work believing better things were ahead. Actor Max Julien said, "You felt you had your foot in the door, but then you found out they were just using it for a doorstop.[20]

In an "Open Letter to Black Artists," writer Leland H. Clegg II eloquently voiced his observations black artists and their involvement in the controversy.

> Not much has changed on Broadway or in Hollywood as far as black artists are concerned. But there is a new and most disturbing trend that has developed over the past 10 years: Many of you, as black actors and actresses, no longer protest the demeaning roles that producers have expressly fashioned for black people but clamor to be chosen, above all others, for a part, any part, so that you, too, can become a star. What is worse, some of our once distinguished black actors are now producing plays and films that are even more degrading of the black image than all of their predecessors combined.
>
> Therefore, the maids and butlers of yesteryear have become the pimps, prostitutes, thieves and hustlers of today — some of whose roles were created by black newspapers and magazines and are revered by the black community as a whole.
>
> A few of you, to be sure, have taken strong stands against the limited offers that you have received. One or two have actually remained unemployed rather than to degrade yourselves or the image of your people. But the overwhelming number of black actors and actresses have blithely accepted any role, despite its implications, as is clearly evidenced by those appearing in NBC's controversial "Beulah Land" series. . . .

From "The Birth of a Nation" to "Beulah Land" black pressure groups have fought a continuous battle to improve the image of blacks in movies. With the NAACP at the front of the battle lines, these groups fought to convince directors, producers, writers and white America that the black man was more than an ignorant savage or cheerful flunky. They have fought to have the black man and woman portrayed realistically and compassionately.

"The Birth of a Nation" appeared despite the protest. The NAACP achieved some revisions in "Gone With the Wind." And in "Beulah Land" NBC shortened the scene in which the slaves rejected their freedom.[21]

Some battles were won, some were lost, but the struggle continues.

FOOTNOTES

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2. Ibid.

3. Daniel J. Leab, **From Sambo to Superspade**, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1975), p. 20.
4. **Ibid.**, p. 25.
5. **Ibid.**, p. 37.
6. **Ibid.**
7. Leab, p. 39.
8. **Ibid.**, p. 99.
9. **Ibid.**, p. 101.
10. **Ibid.**, p. 137.
11. **Ibid.**
12. **Ibid.**
13. **Ibid.**, p. 234.
14. Michael Mattox, "The Day the Movie Stars Got Militant," **Black Creation**, Winter '73, p. 41.
15. Leab, p. 258.
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18. **Ibid.**, p. 36.
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21. Waters, p. 129.